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SUBJECT: ECOWAS MEDIATOR OPENS TALKS ON NIGER

REF: Niamey 899

11. (U) Summary: November 9, members of the People's Movement for the Reshaping of the Republic (MPRR) met with General Abdusalami Abubakar (retired), ECOWAS Mediator responsible for dealing with Niger's political crisis. MPPR members submitted a memorandum outlining the Government of Niger's (GON) defense of recent political actions. They also argued that President Tandja had not violated the 1999 constitution, that the constitutional referendum was requested by the majority of Nigeriens, and that its results expressed the will of the people. End Summary.

Tandja's Supporters Label ECOWAS Unfair

12. (U) When MPPR members returned to Niamey from Abuja on November 10, they held a press conference in which they maintained that the August 4, 2009 referendum expressed the will of "the people" and was an "act of sovereignty", that there was no crisis at all, and that Niger was making headway on its development objectives. According to the memorandum, ECOWAS' decision to suspend Niger was unfair to the GON, and it also urged ECOWAS to reconsider its current stance. The MPPR delegation was mainly made up of Tazarce supporters; including political party leaders, civil society activists, traditional chiefs, and religious leaders. (Note: Tazarce is Hausa language for "let it continue." End note.) There were no incumbent GON cabinet members in the MPPR delegation.

ECOWAS Mediator Meets with Opposition Group

13. (SBU) On November 11-13, ECOWAS mediator Abubakar met with the Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR), a coalition of political parties, civil society organizations, and trade unions. The CFDR also submitted a document containing a genesis of political developments during 2009 and providing legal arguments against the events leading up to the August 4 referendum that they termed as a "coup d'etat."

Opposition Labels President Tandja Irresponsible

14. (SBU) The CFDR members challenged the legitimacy of the Tazarce delegation because they had hoped to see a government delegation with decision-making powers. It also labeled President Tandja's decision to send such a delegation as an "irresponsible and condescending attitude that flouts regional and international institutions." The CFDR further expressed concern that direct negotiations between the two protagonists should not take place in Niamey, because it believed that discussions would be disturbed by

hardliners on both sides, especially President Tandja's supporters who may be allowed extensive use of public media to cast diatribes against the opposition and sabotage the talks.

Comment

15. (SBU) Critics believe that President Tandja purposefully chose to send representatives to Abuja without a clear official mandate - knowing that they would have little room to negotiate, much less authority to make official commitments. They argue that President Tandja and his supporters were just trying to delay further national, regional, and international action while moving quickly to consolidate the president's de-facto government. This appears more evident with the immediate validation of the legislative election results and the quick installation of the new National Assembly (reftel).

16. (U) The GON and the CFDR remain in a political impasse with no foreseeable solution in the near future. End Comment.

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